



'New' Vigilante Groups Keep a Violent Tradition Alive in Michoacán (/news-analysis/new-vigilante-groups-in-michoacan-mexico-resemble-predecessors)

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Members of the vigilante group "White Trojans"
in Michoacán

The appearance of new and recycled armed groups whose motives are as questionable as their video-making credentials is the latest manifestation of Michoacán's continued descent into nebulous criminal-vigilante territory.

A report

(<http://www.noventagrados.com.mx/nacional/reapareceran-las-autodefensas-de-michoacan-informan-comandantes.htm>) by a news site called Noventa Grados, which was loosely translated and republished by Borderland Beat (<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2016/04/the-reappearance-of-autodefensas-in.html>), says groups in several municipalities are rearming themselves. A leader identified only as "El Dorado," blamed Michoacán Governor Silvano Aureoles for the resurgence, accusing the official of assisting a drug cartel.

"We decided to start meeting again and getting our weapons ready to free our people from organized crime," he is quoted as saying.

Last month, a group which calls itself the Insurgency for Institutional and Social Rescue (Insurgencia por el Rescate Institucional y Social – IRIS), emerged. As their videos show (/news-briefs/anti-corruption-guerrilla-heightens-michoacan-unrest), IRIS has also chosen to mimic former vigilante groups that have battled with criminal organizations in the Mexican state.

In a video released at the end of March (see below), IRIS members presented themselves as distinct from the drug cartels (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SoyFU7Px38g>) that have long operated in the state. Like "El Dorado," they promoted idealistic causes and denounced alleged links between organized crime and the government in Michoacán.



IRIS is one of many new organizations trying to make their mark in the competitive context that has emerged with the decline of the Knights Templar (<http://www.insightcrime.org/mexico-organized-crime-news/knights-templar>) criminal organization and subsequent demobilization of self-defense groups that had risen to fight the Knights.

As a result, Michoacán is still awash with armed groups of men and the occasional assault rifle-toting woman. Old names like the Familia Michoacana have resurfaced, and new groups have emerged in the last two years (</news-analysis/new-criminal-players-in-mexico-embattled-michoacan-state>). Legitimate armed actors, such as indigenous community police forces, also maintain a presence.

Former members of self-defense groups who have in theory gone back to their regular jobs following the vigilantes' dubious legalization in May 2014 (</news-analysis/no-solution-sight-mexico-michoacan-vigilante-problem>) are stepping back into the arena.

The newer groups are most likely related to the previous ones, and even to each other. Some individuals make a habit of taking up arms, or of switching their allegiances from one gang to another. Through a discourse that sides with the state's

downtrodden, they appear to be replicating a *modus operandi* that has proved successful in the past.

The fight against corruption forms the core of their message. It is a logical choice, given that anti-corruption forces are mobilizing in a variety of arenas throughout Mexico (<http://www.insightcrime.org/mexico-organized-crime-news>) and the rest of Latin America.

The International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (<http://www.insightcrime.org/guatemala-organized-crime-news>) (Comisión Internacional Contra la Impunidad en Guatemala (<http://www.insightcrime.org/guatemala-organized-crime-news>) - CICIG (/news-briefs/municipal-corruption-new-focus-of-guatemalan-prosecutors)) and throngs of protesters have taken down a sitting president. The Mission to Support the Fight Against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (<http://www.insightcrime.org/honduras-organized-crime-news>) (Misión de Apoyo Contra la Corrupción y la Impunidad en Honduras (<http://www.insightcrime.org/honduras-organized-crime-news>) - MACCIH (/news-briefs/all-eyes-on-honduras-corruption-and-justice-system-reforms)) is preparing to get underway. People have taken to the streets in massive protests in Brazil (/news-briefs/brazilians-protest-demand-president-impeachment) to call for the resignation of that country's president.

Across the region citizens are standing up to confront this long-standing problem, and it is an issue that resonates with the people of Michoacán.

Focusing on corruption also has parallels with the former self-defense groups' call for the people to unite against a common enemy, in their case the plague visited on Michoacán by the criminally violent Knights Templar (/mexico-organized-crime-news/knights-templar).

The state's self-defense groups may be done fighting the Knights, but their knowhow and their model can be appropriated by any armed group. Despite their contradictions, the former self-defense groups were effective, so it's not surprising that others would want to replicate what they did.

SEE ALSO: Mexico's Security Dilemma: Michoacán's Militias
(/investigations/mexico-michoacan-vigilantes)

Despite its proven track record, this model is not the only path groups are taking in the post-Knights Templar (<http://www.insightcrime.org/mexico-organized-crime-news/knights-templar>) environment. Other organizations in Michoacán might try to adopt the self-defense group's trappings, but have a different nature altogether.

Consider the appearance of the so-called "White Trojans" (<http://www.proceso.com.mx/409951>) (Los Blancos de Troya), who came onto the scene in mid-2015. Their abundant weaponry tells a different story and project a different image. Sources within the vigilante movement say the White Trojans have ties to Los Viagras (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZdznzzKR4CI&feature=youtu.be>), one of the groups that emerged as a power broker after fall of the Knights Templar (<http://www.insightcrime.org/mexico-organized-crime-news/knights-templar>).

For their part, Los Viagras are very active spreading disinformation, as shown by their communique denouncing deals between the self-defense groups and organized crime. This statement was later attributed (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49qv1Mra5eo>) to the Jalisco Cartel (<http://www.insightcrime.org/mexico-organized-crime-news/jalisco-cartel-new-generation>) – New Generation (Cartel de Jalisco - Nueva Generación), another organization that has sought to take advantage of the power vacuum.

Disinformation campaigns are also employed in other parts of Mexico (<http://www.insightcrime.org/mexico-organized-crime-news>) where complex criminal organizations operate. In the northeastern state of Tamaulipas, for example, mysterious self-defense groups known as "armed columns" and named for patriotic historical figures have emerged to target drug traffickers.

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While IRIS might not be cut from the same cloth as groups with clear ties to organized crime like Los Viagras and La Nueva Familia (</news-briefs/nueva-familia-announces-arrival-amid-michoacan-turmoil>), they do have one thing in common: a desire to shape the security debate in Michoacán.

Indeed, all of these groups emerged since the beginning of February, a week before Michoacán Governor Aureoles presided over the formal disbanding (<http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/estados/2016/02/11/oficializan-fin-de-autodefensas-en-michoacan>) of the former self-defense groups.

SEE ALSO: Knights Templar News and Profile (</mexico-organized-crime-news/knights-templar>)

The re-emergence of irregular armed groups, in itself, calls into question the official narrative that holds that everything has returned to normal following reincorporation of the self-defense groups into civilian life and neutralization of Knights Templar (<http://www.insightcrime.org/mexico-organized-crime-news/knights-templar>) leaders like Nazario "El Chayo" Moreno (</mexico-organized-crime-news/nazario-moreno-gonzalez-el-chayo-el-mas-loco>) and Servant "La Tuta" Gómez. (</servando-gomez-martinez-la-tuta>)

In Michoacán's extremely fluid atmosphere, these groups offer their members an array of potential benefits. They can strike fear into the hearts of their enemies, earn the recognition of local communities, polarize public opinion and act as a latent threat.

The White Trojans offer a case in point. After laying low for several months, the group burst onto the scene with a series of attacks against rivals in retaliation for the killing of well-known drug trafficker Carlos Rosales, alias "El Tísico." (<http://www.changoonga.com/enfrentamientos-en-tierra-caliente-por-venganza-de-los-trojanos-tras-muerte-del-tisico/>)

The primary result of the apparently chaotic emergence of these new organizations has been to create confusion. Although they claim to struggle for noble causes like the fight against corruption, this public discourse is often a smoke screen, obscuring their true intentions.

In this environment, criminal groups with historic ties to the hegemony of the Knights are benefiting from this ambiguity. It is clear that in Michoacán, the combination of propaganda and vigilante strategies is a long tradition that continues to evolve with the times.